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ARCHARD'S AGENTS

Dixon's Agents

Simon Archard has proven to be a most adroit consulting detective—but even the best detectives can use a little help now and then. While readers of Ruse know that Archard has a most capable assistant in the person of Emma Bishop, they are about to learn more of the network of assistants that Archard has assembled over the years... a network known simply as Archard's Agents.

In ***Archard's Agents #1,*** *Chuck Dixon, Mike Perkins, & Laura Villari* elevate members of Archard's unsung support team into a starring role, beginning with a character previously unknown to readers of Ruse.

"Bellings, the manservant character who's at the center of the first story is a character new to readers," Dixon told *CSN*, explaining that each issue would spotlight a different agent in a story constructed to emphasize the skills that character brings to Simon Archard's team gestalt. "Pugilist Pete Grimes (who's starring in the second issue) has appeared in the regular title. Havildar Singh, the agent in the third story, is only tangently connected to Archard, but will be worked into the regular title down the road. The indication is that Simon's network is vast and far-reaching." Just how large a team has Archard assembled? Dixon didn't give a precise number, but he did say that "Mike Perkins and I have *lots* of ideas for future recruits. "

Dixon explained that Archard's Agents is "a spin-off that Mike Perkins and I came up with." Part of the fun of this series is that it allows Dixon & Perkins to tell a story in its entirity in one standard-length comic. "Each issue will feature a one-off adventure of one of Simon Archard's many confidants and operatives; these will be mystery driven but not always in the whodunit category."

Not a typical whodunit? But doesn't that shake up the categorization offered by some that Simon Archard is Sherlock Holmes in a world where magic takes place? "***Ruse*** *isn't* limited to the world of Sherlock Holmes," Dixon explains. "In future issues, the ***Ruse*** team will be exploring outside of Partington and going places Holmes and Watson would never dream of.

"I think this book is informed by the entire spectrum of English fiction from the Doyle period. An upcoming arc delves more into Bronte territory, and there's a decidely *H. Rider Haggard* feel to a future storyline.

"***Archard's Agents*** will be much the same. The first adventure is a twist on the English garden mystery but has a dash of colonial warfare in it. One of my passions is Victorian Imperialism. We get a major nod to the Zulu War in this story. We even open on a very 'fixed bayonets' kind of scene. In our next ***Archard's Agents***, Mike and I go a bit lighter with a comic pastiche mystery featuring Peter Grimes, the bare-knuckle boxer familiar to RUSE fans. And I'm currently writing an installment set in the Raj, this world's version of India."

Don't classify ***Archard's Agents*** as a second Simon Archard book; while the intrepid investigator casts a long shadow over this series, he and Emma don't play a starring role. "They are *very* much a presence in the background of this story; Simon makes a memorable appearance. Actually, involving them in the story in an imaginative way is one of the challenges of this book. It never begins with Simon handing out assignments. The agents more often than not fall into the cases unwittingly or unintentionally, " Dixon said.

In a conversation with ***The Pulse*** (www.comicon.com/pulse), Dixon explained what makes the series offers him as writer. "First, the chance to play in the ***Ruse*** playground—and also ,the chance to work out my tighter plotting muscles. To intro a new character, set up a mystery or conflict and resolve it in twenty-two pages is great exercise. And I get to write all that period dialogue, which I love. It's a more civilized place and time. And the opportunity to work with Mike as both penciler *and* inker was too good to pass on. He's pouring his heart into this and it shows. It's great fun."

The first issue also introduces a new menace for the world of Arcadia: The Consortium of Aggrived Manservants, descirbed by CrossGen as "gentlemen's gentlemen who are no gentlemen at all!" With a name like that, it might be easy to dismiss these guys as comic relief, but Dixon assured *CSN* that there's nothing funny about these guys. "This is a *very* dark tale of revenge and murder. There are humor elements in it but in the end it's a tale of deceit. The Consortium is a cabal of valets and manservants whose plan is to work in the shadows to meet their dastardly and grandiose plans."

While Dixon is making every effort to construct tales that will be totally accessible and enjoyable in and of themselves, it seems unlikely that these remarkable characters would not make an appearance in Ruse at some point... and Dixon acknowledges that's possible. "There's always a chance that Scott and Butch will fold these new characters into the grander, richer scheme of the ongoing. Those guys are building a whole world in that book."

And even before Archard's Agents #1 reaches comic shops, Dixon has some other Ruse-related ideas percolating. "Mike and I would *love* to do some stories with an upcoming character named Theopholus Dare," he said. But just who is Theopholus Dare? That's a subject for another issue!

Archard's Agents #1, a $2.95 comic, is scheduled for December 26th release.

BY CLIFF BIGGERS

Ultimately, a Crossover

It may not be the *first* Ultimate Universe crossover (that honor goes to the short-lived ***Ultimate Marvel Team-Up***, which guest-starred Wolverine and the Ultimate X-Men), but it's certainly the *biggest*. ***Ultimate War*** is just what the name implies: an all-out combat... and the combatants are the Ultimate X-Men and the Ultimates!

Don't dismiss this as one of those meaningless slugfests in which the status quo remains inviolate. Writer *Mark Millar* assures readers that "I really *hate* those crossovers that don't mean anything. The whole idea of a crossover is that we have to do something quite cataclysmic and push the buttons."

Millar considers the epic ***Crisis on Infinite Earths*** as a perfect example of a crossover that fully delivered. "None of the others measure up or are so dramatic. If we were doing a big crossover, we had to push the same buttons." And when it comes to pushing buttons, no one is more expert at it that Millar—after all, he *did* write ***The Authority*** for more than a year prior to coming to Marvel!

The confrontation begins when Nick Fury orders The Ultimates to bring the X-Men down because of the menace they pose to society.Xavier's students aren't inclined to give up without a fight, though—and when it comes to fightiing, they've had plenty of training.

Even before its release the series had stirred up controversy with its realistic depictions of post-combat destruction in New York City. Marvel editor-in-chief Joe Quesada acknowledged that the book's imagse of desturction might be disturbing to some, but he felt that they were important to the story. "Comics are morality plays in which not only do we try to entertain but we also try to educate," Quesada wrote. "We try our best to tell stories about good vs. evil, about heroes triumphing or dying in the trying. The day that we can no longer tackle these subjects is when, as *Mark Millar* said, the terrorist have won.

Should we have asked *Jack Kirby, Will Eisner, Joe Kubert, Joe Simon* and the endless number of talents that graced our industry to stop telling war tales during W.W.II, even though millions of GIs and even more civilians were dying on a daily basis?"

Part of the reason these images might be disturbing to some is due to the Ultimate line's sense of verisimilitude. "The Ultimate universe seems only a step away from where we are right now," Millar said. "It's for a mainstream audience which is more exciting for a writer, because you can draw on real life influences. You can bring in Bin Laden instead of Red Skull."

Ultimate War #1, illustrated by *Chris Bachalo*, should be on the comic shop racks as you read this; #2 follows on December 26th, with the four-issue miniseries continuing through the end of February.

BY ALEX KIRKLAND

Courtesy your friendly neighborhood comics outlet!

Comic Shop Newsarama

For Steve Geppi, A Dream Come True...

Steve Geppi, president and CEO of Diamond Comics Distribution and Gemstone Publishing, has been a fan of Disney characters for as long as he's been a comics reader... so you can only imagine how excited he must be now that his company has acquired the rights to publish Disney Comics featuring Donald, Uncle Scrooge, Mickey, and many other beloved Disney characters.

"The lovable Mickey Mouse, Minnie Mouse, Donald Duck (as well as his nephews!), Daisy Duck, Uncle Scrooge, Goofy, Pluto, and all of the old gang that has entertained the world for the past 75 years will soon return to their comic book roots," Geppi said on the Gemstone website in reference to characters that have been missing from comic book store shelves since 1998.

"Years ago, my heart was broken by the realization that standard Disney character comics were no longer being published in the English language," Geppi continued. "Well, with strong support from Disney Licensed Publishing, I decided to do something about it! The timeless Disney comics that were such an important part of my generation's childhood will now be available to a new generation. Of course, this also means that some of us older folks will get another opportunity to be enchanted by the distinctive artistry and humor of Disney comics."

Gemstone will not only be able to reprint classic Disney material by *Carl Barks*, *Don Rosa*, *William Van Horn*, and other creators, but the company also has the license to create new Disney comics based on the voluminous Disney cast of characters.

"You can imagine how excited I am to be publishing my favorite comics from my childhood," *Steve Geppi* told *Comic Shop Newsarama*. "What a privilege! I promise you will love them. I've hired the same three people who were doing them for Gladstone. They will be moving from Arizona to Maryland in January."

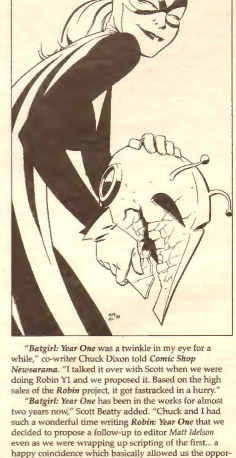
The three people he refers to are John Clark, Gary Leach, and Susan Daigle-Leach, formerly the editorial staff of Gladstone Comics, widely praised for the quality of their Disney books.

"This is a fantastic opportunity to bring back the legendary enjoyment and excitement of Disney comic books," Geppi concluded. "We are looking forward to a long and mutually beneficial relationship with Disney Publishing."

While no firm release dates for Gemstone's first Disney titles have been announced, insiders speculate that fans could see the first books on the stands in April or May.

The Shadow of the Bats

It's been more than two years since *Chuck Dixon* & *Scott Beatty* first explored early Bat-history with their Robin: Year One limited series. This month, the two return to Gotham with another series that offers new insights into the early exploits of a member of the Batfamily. This time, it's Barbara Gordon who's the star—not in her current guise as Oracle, but in her original heroic role as Batgirl.



"Batgirl: Year One was a twinkle in my eye for a while," co-writer Chuck Dixon told *Comic Shop Newsarama*. "I talked it over with Scott when we were doing Robin Y1 and we proposed it. Based on the high sales of the *Robin* project, it got fastracked in a hurry."

"Batgirl: Year One has been in the works for almost two years now," Scott Beatty added. "Chuck and I had such a wonderful time writing *Robin: Year One* that we decided to propose a follow-up to editor *Matt Idelson* even as we were wrapping up scripting of the first... a happy coincidence which basically allowed us the opportunity to plant the seeds for Batgirl's revisited origin in the final issue of *Robin: Year One*. Of the major Bat-Characters in costume, this story completes the *Year One* 'trinity' of original Caped Crusaders..."

Beatty acknowledges that the series sets Barbara Gordon's Batgirl origins much closer in time to Robin's beginnings than they were in our world, but he doesn't see that as a major shift in continuity. "DC continuity is a slippery slope... and one that sloughs right off the hill like a mudslide when scrutinized too closely. Has Bruce been Batman for just ten years... or longer? Yes... and no. Don't gaze too closely at the abyss.

"You're correct in assuming that Babs' decision comes nearer to Robin's own debut... but not so near that he hasn't settled into his niche in the Batcave. In fact, there are also references to Dick's "extracurricular" activities at this point. But the basic chronology remains the same. *Batgirl: Year One* begins with the origin established in *Detective #359*... albeit supplemented with a few new wrinkles which tie that Barbara Gordon to who she is today in *Birds of Prey* and the other core Bat-titles."

Besides, as Dixon points out, "Batgirl's origin was the first retro fit ever done in comics, anyway. The appearance of the character on TV prompted DC to put her in the books in a very rushed and contrived way that implied that we had always known about Jim Gordon's daughter. So the playing field was wide open."

Even though Barbara Gordon has been ex-Batgirl for almost as long as she was Batgirl, her Batgirl remains extremely popular with fans. What's responsible for that popularity? "I think it was one of those happy accidents where a character takes on a life of their own," Dixon said. "And *John Ostrander* rescued Babs from obscurity by creating the Oracle persona. That simply added to the legendary status of Batgirl."

"Barbara Gordon is one of the few Bat-characters who took up cape and cowl for reasons *not* involving the murders of her parents," Beatty explained. "Babs' will to do good involved co-opting an established vigilante motif and fighting her way into an already established 'boy's club' based in a subterranean Batcave. She wasn't asked to join. In fact, she was discouraged. But she did it anyway... even though Babs' costumed career would ultimately end in tragedy. She endured though... and that indomitable spirit, which was present from the beginning, is what makes Barbara Gordon such a compelling character."

Beatty offered a synopsis of *Batgirl: Year One*. "Again, the 'root' story is *Detective #359* and Killer Moth's attempted kidnapping of Bruce Wayne at the Policemen's Masquerade Ball. Both Killer Moth's failure that night and Babs' debut as Batgirl drive the miniseries. Killer Moth doesn't take humiliation lightly... and Barbara Gordon finds that *not* being Batgirl is harder than going it alone and tackling criminals without Batman's official seal of approval.

"The 'established' origin is our starting point, but other events chronicled in *Batgirl: Year One* will bring a deeper understanding of how Babs generated herself for this undertaking... and why she started down this road in the first place. Her relationship with Jim Gordon is pivotal, as is her first encounter with a certain Dynamic Duo. Killer Moth will find an unlikely ally. And readers will see more than a few guest-stars linking Batgirl to Oracle in the grand scheme of DC lore."

Beatty is particularly pleased with the work of *Batgirl: Year One* penciller *Marcos Martin*. "Boy... if I had a nickel for every time I've praised his work... He's absolutely *amazing*. Marcos's good friend *Alvaro Lopez* is inking, so the art has a definite synergy with both penciler and inker being so closely involved with the final product. They're a phenomenal team. Marcos is also a close friend of *Javier Pulido*, artist of *Robin: year One*. Marcos and Javier have complementary styles... and it was simply a no-brainer in choosing Marcos for the follow-up after he wowed us on a fill-in issue of Chuck's *Birds of Prey* and our collaborative *Joker: Last Laugh #2*. Marcos also pinch-hit on the close of *Robin: Year One*, so he's had an idea from the start that he would be our man. *Batgirl: Year One* will be one of the most gorgeous comics of 2003... and Marcos will likely be a breakout talent. You heard it here first."

Dixon explained that, prior to this series, Batgirl's "beginnings have never been seriously revisited or explored. So we were free to create without violating existing continuity. The premise follows the theme of Babs' life; a series of unintended consequences. She sets a goal for herself of becoming a crimefighter and is thwarted at every turn. Then what starts as a joke becomes her destiny. We also present the origins of two major Bat-villains and pay off on *lots* of "Easter egg"' from my run on *Birds of Prey*."

While understandably reluctant to give away too many story details, Beatty did offer a few teasers. "Readers will see Batgirl's first encounters in the Batcave, which isn't exactly a pleasant experience. They'll witness Babs' 'close encounters'" with several other Gotham-based costumed crimefighters outside of the Bat-Family. They'll learn just how *Year One* ranges with DCU Editorial. As a devotee of DC history, my previous two *Year One* ventures have been thoroughly satisfying creative experiences. Since Chuck is exclusive to CrossGen Comics. *Batgirl: Year One* is our first collaboration for the immediate future. I'll be going it alone on any future *Year One* projects, if any. However, *Year One* or no, I'm lobbying quite aggressively to work with *Marcos Martin* on my next DCU venture. And I'd certainly welcome any opportunity to write for *Javier Pulido* again

Dixon adds that, if there are any more *Year One* series to be done, "Scott is the man for the task. Personally, I can't wait to see 'em!"

Batgirl: Year One #1 is scheduled for December 18th release.

Y A Trade Paperback? Y Not?!

Tried to find a copy of *Y—The Last Man* recently? This hot new Vertigo series has not only broken the typical publishing pattern by increasing sales with each issue, but it has also sold out of the first five issues... and in fact, the fifth issue sold out less than a day after release, in spite of a healthy overprinting.

It should be no surprise to anyone, therefore, that Vertigo already has a trade paperback of *Y—The Last Man* in the works. What might be surprising, though, is that they're rushing the book into the system. *Y—The Last Man: Unmanned*, a 128-page trade paperback, is scheduled to be in stores on December 18th—the same day that *Y #6* is scheduled for release. That means that no reader has to miss out on the excitement of this thought-provoking, sophisticated science fiction drama.

"Everyone here has been very happy to see the growth of Y over the past few months," *Vince Letterio*, DC's Manager - Direct Sales, said. "A collected edition will make it easy for new readers to catch up with this exciting story as it continues to unfold."

"Co-creator *Pia Guerra* and I always wanted Y: *The Last Man* to be the kind of book that you'd want to share with your significant other," writer *Brian K. Vaughan* said. "This collected edition will be the perfect package for readers to share with their noncomics-reading friends—and I hope they do! The Y virus' explosive chain of transmission must continue!"

Two-Fisted Tales

A lot of folks are going to be *very* surprised by *Thunderbolts #76*.

First off, the characters you've come to know over the years won't be making an appearance in the book. Instead, the new creative team of *John Arcudi* & *Francisco Ruiz Velasco* is pretty much tossing out everything but the title and rebuilding the book from the ground up.

"Although the series will star super-villains, don't expect them to have that 'Golden Age' glow," Marvel's *Bill Rosemann* said. "This isn't about jailbreaks, bags of cash with big dollar signs printed on them, or running away while twirling a pencil-thin mustache. Instead, Arcudi and Velasco reveal what happens to thugs who face a future devoid of hope. It's a voyeuristic look at a world of bloody brawls in abandoned warehouses, the lure of easy money and the desperate smell of sweaty losers. Following the sadistic story of an underground fight ring, the monthly series asks: if you're trying to do the right thing, do you stay bitter in your lousy day job or do you make one last grab for fame... by busting heads?"

"We pick up with our main guy just out of prison, but he can't get his drink on because his parole officer is on his back," explained editor *Andrew Lis*. "So if that's what you do to relax, what's next? Do you go back to crime? Do you walk the straight-and-narrow? Or—when a surprise opportunity rears its head—do you reach for that ring?

"Anyone who read John's work on *The Mask*—one of the smartest satires of the last fifteen years—or the cult-hit *Major Bummer*, will love this.."

Thunderbolts #76 is scheduled for mid-February release.

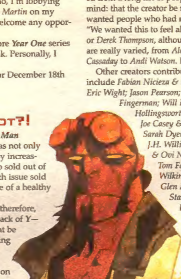
Hell of a Year at Dark Horse

Thanksgiving may be history for another year, but fans of *Mike Mignola's* **Hellboy** won't have to wait until next November to be thankful. The gang at Dark Horse has oodles of **Hellboy** goodness in the works, including an eight issue anthology miniseries, four one shots, a **Hellboy** story by creator *Mike Mignola*, and a **Hellboy** hardcover.

The festivities begin in February, when both the anthology begins, and the hardcover ships. Originally announced as Hellboy: Anthology, it appears that the book may undergo a name change prior to release. "We're still working on the title, but it's very close to being **Hellboy: Weird Tales,**" editor *Scott Allie* told *Comic Shop Newsarama*. "The series will run eight issues, three or four stories per issue, with some pinups, many superstars, and many surprising new talents. Each issue will have roughly twenty-six pages of story."

Allie said that the artists for the anthology were selected from a long list of people with one general criteria in mind: that they were a big fan to **Hellboy.** "We mostly wanted people who had not contributed before," Allie said. "We wanted this to feel all new. So you won't see *Ryan Sook* or *Derek Thompson*, although we love their work. The styles are really varied, from *Alex Maleev* to *Jeff Matsuda* to *John Cassaday* to *Andi Watson*. It's all over the place..."

Other creators contributing to the anthology series include *Fabian Nicieza* & *Stefano Raffaele*, *Mark Ricketts* & *Eric Wight*, *Jason Pearson*, *Randy Stradley* & *Seung Kim*; *Bob Fingerman*; *Will Pfeiffer* & *P. Craig Russell*; *Matt Hollingsworth*; *John Arcudi* & *Roger Langridge*; *Joe Casey* & *Steve Parkhouse*; *Evan Dorkin* & *Sarah Dyer*; *Scott Morse*; *Haden Blackman* & *J.H. Williams III*; *Eric Powell*; *Tom Sniegoski* & *Ooi Nedelcu*; *Doug Petrie* & *Gene Colan*; *Tom Fassbender*, *Jim Pascoe* & *Simeon Williams*; *Chris Thompson*, *Randy Green*; *Glen Murakami*; *Ron Marz* & *Jim Starlin*; and *Sarah Ryan* & *Steve Lieber*. Covers for the series will be provided by Cassaday, Pearson, Maleev, *Leinil Yu*, *JH Williams*, and *Mignola*.



Hellboy movie designer *Sykaben Ellington*, *William Stout*, and *Dave Stevens* are slated to provide pinups.

Also in February is the 200 page *Art of Hellboy* hardcover, that covers the ten years plus of art from Mignola.

According to Allie, the "unseen" components of the hardcover hover at around 40% of the total package, along with reprinted covers, unused, but finished art, and sketchbook entries. "The book includes most of the covers to the individual comics, since we don't reprint the covers, at least not in color, in the trades," Allie said. "And the book is 9" x 12", so at the very least, most everything is bigger than it's ever been seen. But there are unfinished pages, unused covers, promotional artwork that was only ever used once in an ad, or a magazine cover, or a poster.

"We've scanned some original pages, so you can see

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the brushstrokes in the ink, see all the little details that don't show up in print. A lot of his sketchbook stuff, a lot of convention sketches that no one's ever seen. And he did about twenty new drawings just for this book. *Dave Stewart* colored those, and he colored some material that's been seen only in black and white, previously. It's art on every page, no white pages in the middle of the book, not a lot of design work...

"It's something we've always wanted to do, but we've both been too busy," Allie said. "When we were looking at 2003, we were looking at two facts: The approach of the movie will generate more interest in Hellboy than ever, and yet Mike is going to be busy working with del Toro on the movie–he's been heavily involved in the script, and he's designed a lot of things on the movie, as well as working with the other designers to make sure everything feels like Hellboy. So at the very time when people are hearing more about Hellboy than ever, he's going to be least able to produce new comics."

Allie noted that Mignola will contribute a ***Hellboy*** story to Dark Horse's upcoming ***Hauntings***, an anthology about haunted houses, akin to the publisher's recent ***Happy Endings*** anthology. "It's thirteen pages long, and it's the craziest Hellboy story in a long time," Allie said. "The book was actually suggested by the fact that he wanted to do this wild story and we needed somewhere to put it. As good a reason as any to do a book, I think."

After that story, Mignola is slated to begin work on a new miniseries, ***Hellboy: The Island***. "But with the movie, and a likely trip to Prague in the spring, it probably won't come out until 2004," Allie said. " It's a direct follow-up to ***The Third Wish***, where we left Hellboy floating in the ocean."

Also in 2003, The Bureau of Paranormal Research and Defense gets more chances to shine in four separate ***BPRD*** one shots by various creators new to ***Hellboy***, with the first slated to ship in May. ""Mike and I just went over *Mike Avon Oeming & Miles Gunter's* script for the first one, and *Brian Augustyn* should anyday be turning in the script for the second one, to be drawn by *Guy Davis*," Allie said. "Then we have *Geoff Johns & Scott Kolins* lined up to do one, and *Joe Harris & Adam Pollina*."

And despite the volume of ***Hellboy***-related projects coming throughout next year, Allie said that he and Mignola are planning on ramping things up even more as the release of the movie draws closer. Currently the movie is tentatively slated for a 2004 release.

Coming Comics—Marvel in February

Alias Volume Two: Come Home follows superheroine-turned-PI Jessica Jones s she investigates the disappearance of a teenage girl who is rumored to be a mutant. *Brian Bendis & Michael Gaydos* also follow Jessica as she goes out on a date with Ant-Man.

Big things are in store for Peter Parker in ***Amazing Spider-Man #50***, as he and Mary Jane make a fateful decision involving their marriage. *J. Michael Straczynski, John Romita Jr., & Scott Hanna* assure readers that this isn't a tease—major decisions are made in this issue, and you'll want to be on hand to find out what those decisions are.

Daredevil continues its twice-monthly schedule in February, with #43 and #44 both slated for release. The "Lowlife" storyline continues as Matt Murdock's defense of his secret identity takes a huge turn... for the worse!

The storyline that revealed Daredevil's secret identity to the world is collected in ***Daredevil Volume 5: Out***, a 208-page trade paperback featuring the memorable storyline by *Brian Bendis & Alex Maleev*.

The Exiles are about to lose a charter member—so will it be Blink, Mimic, Nocturne, or Morph? Only *Judd Winick, J. Calafiore, & Jan Haldridge* know for sure—and they're making you wait for ***Exiles #22*** to find out...

The reality-hopping Exiles confront altered versions of Weapon X and Namor, among other adversaries, in ***Exiles Volume Three: Out of Time***, reprinting *Judd Winick, Mike McKone, & J. Calafiore's* ***Exiles #s 12-19***.

The Incredible Hulk turns fifty—issues, not years—in February... and to celebrate, Marvel is welcoming new ongoing artist *Mike Deodato*, who illustrates one monstrously impressive Hulk! As for the story—well, they've written by *Bruce Jones*, who's made ***The Hulk*** one of Marvel's must-read titles...

Marvel delivers a pair of straight-ahead superhero tales in ***Marvel Double-Shot #4***. The book leads off with an Iron Man tale by *Greg Rucka & Klaus Janson*, then follows that up with a magical Dr. Strange moment, courtesy of *Michael T. Gilbert*.

The Rawhide Kid returns... but will *Ron Zimman deliver a serious Western to* stand alongside the Marvel-ous Western work of *John Ostrander*, or will he offer up more of his trademark silliness? Can't answer that one for sure—but we can say that, with *John Severin* supplying the art and *Dave Johnson* doing the cover honors, it's going to look darn pretty! (And speaking of *John Ostrander & Leonardo Manco's* wonderful Westerns, their ***Apache Skies*** series from this past summer is getting the trade paperback treatment in February, too—and Rawhide Kid's a part of that series as well!)

Dan Jurgens takes an issue off, so *Christopher Priest & Trent Kenisge* do the honors on ***Thor #59***, a standalone story set in the distant future. But Jurgens and artist *Joe Bennett* are back two weeks later to kick off a new storyline, "Spiral," that explores the dark consequences of the Thunder God's actions.

Think you know what the ***Thunderbolts*** is about? Think again! Marvel's tossing out everything you knew about this series to reinvent it as a Marvel version of "Fight Club," with bottom-of-the-heap supervillains slugging it out in abandoned warehouses in search of a quick buck. *John Arcudi & Francisco Ruiz Velasco* are sure to stir up some buzz with this radical revamp of the superteam in ***Thunderbolts #76***.

If you loved Marvel's first ***Ultimate Spider-Man*** hardcover, then you'll be especially happy to hear that they're readying a followup volume. ***Ultimate Spider-Man Volume Two*** reprints ***Ultimate Spidey #s 14-27*** by *Brian Bendis & Mark Bagley*, along with all-new behind-the-scenes info, in an oversized 336-page volume. Fans who are just as happy with trade paperbacks can get a jump on the hardcover collectors, because the same month sees the release of ***Ultimate Spider-Man Vol 5: Public Scrutiny***, reprinting *#s 28-32* of the hot series.

Ultimate X-Men Volume 4: Hellfire & Brimstone compiles *Mark Millar, Adam Kubert, & Kaare Andrews'* Jean Grey-Phoenix storyline from ***Ultimate X-Men #s 21-25*** in an affordable 144-page trade paperback.

Remember that bit of ***Punisher*** silliness that transformed Wolverine into the Marvel equivalent of Wile E. Coyote, to be shot-gunned and steamrollered? Well, it's payback time in ***Wolverine #186***, as *Frank Tieri & Sean Chen* have a little bit of fun at Frank Castle's expense...

Marvel is blurbing ***X-Men Unlimited #42*** as an "all telepathic issue." The lead story stars Emma Frost, courtesy of *David Conway & Kerim Grant*. Additional tales spotlight Professor X (by *Darko Macan & Daniyel Zezelj*) and Jean Grey (by *J. Torres & Takeshi Miyazawa*).

Peter Milligan & Mike Allred's quirky ***X-Statix #s 1-5*** are collected in ***X-Statix Volume One***, which picks up where the second ***X-Force*** trade paperback by the same team left off.

Coming Comics—Dark Horse in February

Buffy the Vampire Slayer: Note From the Underground collects the final *Fabian Nicieza* story arc alongside the first Buffy tale by *Scott Lobdell*. If you missed 'em in ***Buffy #s 47-50***, you can find 'em here!

Dark Horse's syrocco-styled statue line continues with ***Classic Comic Characters #38: Buck Rogers***, a 5.5" tall sculpture of *Dick Calkins'* comic strip version of *Philip Francis Nowlan's* time-spanning space hero.

Four random publications strangely reappear, months after their release, melded together in an unusual anagram. Paranormal? Nah, just Dark Horse collecting ***Fort! Prophet of the Unexplained*** in trade paperback. See Charles Fort in action as he seeks out the bizarre and outré.

Grendel: God & the Devil #1 re-presents the original ***Grendel #24*** by *Matt Wagner, John K. Snyder III, & Jay Geldhof*, with newly remastered color by *Jeromy Cox*. The story, set a half-millennium in the future, pits a future Grendel against Orion Assante as the two wage war against a post-apocalyptic backdrop of religious corruption.

Mike Mignola invites such chums as *John Cassaday, TyRuben Ellington, Fabian Nicieza, & Andi Watson* into his

Moore Marvel Busts in Dynamic Forces' Future

Bowen Designs' license to produce mini-busts based on Marvel Comics characters may be coming to an end, but fans needn't worry about a shortage of beautifully-designed Marvel mini-busts. Dynamic Forces, who have produced their own mini-busts in the past year, have reached an agreement with *Clayburn Moore* of Moore Creations—and that means that Moore Creations, already known for their quality work on statues and action figures, will sculpt a series of Marvel character busts and dioramas that will be marketed by Dynamic Forces.

"This first collaborative effort between Dynamic Forces and Moore Creations is sure to be a sound creative partnership," *Joseph Rybandt* of Dynamic Forces said. "With Moore Creations' reputation for beautifully sculpted women and dynamic male figures, and both firms' production management strengths, collectors and fans will reap the benefits from these wonderful sculptures."

"Clay's been a friend for years and we both share a passion for the Marvel 'classics.'" Dynamic Forces president *Nick Barrucci* said. "What's really surprising is that it took this long for us to find a project to work on together—but with our Marvel resin license and Clay's masterful sculpting, the wait will definitely be worth it!"

"Nick Barrucci and Dynamic Forces have done some excellent work in this industry, and I feel that together we can do some amazing Marvel sculptures that collectors and fans will be thrilled to own," *Clayburn Moore*, President and CEO of Moore Creations, Inc., added.

And to give fans an idea of what's in store, Dynamic Forces has supplied a sneak peek of the upcoming Mary Jane Watson bust, inspired by *John Romita's* rendition of the red-haired beauty from ***Amazing Spider-Man***.

NEGATION #13

Written by Tony Bedard, art by Paul Pelletier & Dave Meikis, colors by James Rochelle

Trapped in a twisted universe ruled by the Negation Empire, an ordinary man named Obregon Kaine pits his extraordinary cunning and courage against the greatest foe imaginable. Escaping the prison planet was just the beginning — can Kaine's fugitives win a war for freedom when every star in the sky belongs to the god-king Charon?

This is it — Kaine leads a strike directly at the heart of the Negation! It's a desperate raid on the Throneworld itself that brings our heroes face to face with Emperor Charon and his fiercest guardians. Don't miss this turning point for Kaine's hardy band of fugitives, as a year's worth of breakneck adventures come to a very explosive head!

32 pages full color, on sale December 11..... $2.95

ROUTE 666 #7

Written by Tony Bedard, art by Karl Moline & John Delin, colors by Nick Bell

Is Cassie Starkweather a crazed killer or a psychic savior? Wanted for murder, Cassie is an escaped mental patient who claims to have uncovered a vast supernatural invasion. As she fights a lonely war to keep the monsters and evil spirits from stealing innocent souls, one question haunts her: Are the creatures she fights real… or are they her own inner demons?

There's a time for running, but now Cassie must fight or die. She turns for help to the one man who may hate her more than anyone. But can Sheriff Fernandez forgive Cassie for the death of his son? Plus: meet the mysterious "Board of Directors" who will soon make Cassie's life even more of a living hell!

32 pages full color, on sale December 11..... $2.95

DECEMBER

- ❑ 12/04 DEMONWARS: TRIAL #1
- ❑ 12/04 MYSTIC #31
- ❑ 12/04 THE FIRST #26
- ❑ 12/04 THE FIRST VOL 3:SINISTER MOTIVES
- ❑ 12/04 THE RED STAR VOL.2: NOKGORCA HC
- ❑ 12/04 WAY OF THE RAT #8
- ❑ 12/11 FORGE #9
- ❑ 12/11 NEGATION #13
- ❑ 12/11 SIGIL #31
- ❑ 12/11 SOJOURN #18
- ❑ 12/18 CRUX #21
- ❑ 12/18 ROUTE 666 #7
- ❑ 12/18 SCION #31
- ❑ 12/24 ARCHARD'S AGENTS #1
- ❑ 12/24 EDGE #9
- ❑ 12/24 MERIDIAN #31
- ❑ 12/24 RUSE #15
- ❑ 12/24 THE PATH #10

playground—and the result is ***Hellboy: Anthology #1***, a collection of Hellboy tales in the Mignola tradition.

Dark Horse & Gentle Giant Studios, the folks responsible for those stunning ***Star Wars*** mini-busts, have joined forces again—and this time, they're taking fans into the ***Matrix*** with a line of busts. The first offerings include *Neo*, as portrayed by *Keanu Reeves*; and ***Trinity***, as portrayed by *Carrie-Ann Moss*. Based on actual three-dimensional computer scanning, the realism extends to the finest details of clothing and accessories.

Mike Mignola: The Art of Hellboy is a two hundred page hardcover featuring previously unpublished art, unused and unfinished covers, and art selected from ten years of sketchbooks. ***The Art of Hellboy*** provides the ultimate inside look at Mignola's design, storytelling, and color work.

Wanna find out what the Rest in Peace Department is? Then check out *Peter M. Lenkov, Lucas Marangon, & Randy Emberlin's* ***R.I.P.D.*** trade paperback, which introduces the devoted, yet dead, officers of divine law enforcement "patrolling the deadbeat…reporting to one boss." Yep — *that* boss. Nick Cruz was murdered by an unknown assailant, at the height of his personal and professional life. Now he's traded a hundred years of service to the R.I.P.D. in exchange for a shot at finding who killed him. Unfortunately his search will take him to Hell and back — literally!

The remastered reprinting of Marvel's ***Star Wars*** series continues with ***Star Wars: A Long Time Ago… Volume Five—Fool's Bounty***, a 376-page trade paperback reprinting ***Star Wars #s 68-81***, along with ***Star Wars Annual #3***. Most of these stories take place after *The Empire Strikes Back*, as Han Solo's friends continue to search for their lost scoundrel, and this volume ends with Marvel's first story set in the Return of the Jedi era—"Jawas of Doom."

February's the month of amour, and Dark Horse pays tribute to St. Valentine's Day with ***Star Wars: A Valentine Story*** by *Judd Winick & Paul Chadwick*. In a tale set during the days leading up to The Empire Strikes Back, Han Solo and Princess Leia find themselves trapped together on a downed starship, lost in the frozen wastelands of Hoth as a storm rages around them. And while the snow flies outside the ship, the sparks fly inside. No matter how hard they fight it, there's more going on between them than just friendship!

John Ostrander, Jan Duursema, & Dan Parsons pit Mace Windu against the Jedi sword-master who tutored him in light-saber combat in ***Star Wars: Jedi—Mace Windu***, a forty-eight page oneshot that features a light-saber battle the likes of which you've never seen on the big screen!

Coming Comics—DC in February

Action becomes the first American comic series to reach the eight hundred mark—and to celebrate, DC is making ***Action Comics #800*** an event in itself, featuring a sixty-four page look back at the life of Superman, the icon who has been the template for virtually every comic-book hero to follow! How has the Man of Steel affected the lives of those around him? Whether inspiring acts of unimaginable heroism or unspeakable evil, Superman's life since his crash-landing on Earth has had far-reaching consequences the entire DC Universe. This special issue re-examines Superman's life and the impact he's made both as a real and fictional character. A series of reality-based vignettes by guest artists delves into Superman's influence on the lives of everyday people throughout his comics history and beyond!

Superman guest-stars in ***Batman #612***, the continuation of *Jeph Loeb, Jim Lee, & Scott Williams'* "Hush." It's the fight you've waited for, discussed and argued about: Batman vs. Superman, toe-to-toe! How do you stop the Man of Steel? Who can outwit the World's Greatest Detective? What could bring these uneasy allies to the brink of war? Who will be left standing in a battle that could bring down the city of Metropolis?

Batman: Bruce Wayne—Fugitive Volume Two presents the final segment of 2002's hottest storyline. In this

volume (which reprints ***Detective #s 768-772, Gotham Knights #31***, and ***Batman #605***) Batman begins to unravel the final pieces of the mystery of Vesper Fairchild's murder. Ultimately, Batman stands face to face with Vesper's real killer, and the stunning revelation sends shockwaves through the Dark Knight's world for some time to come.

More than a year ago, Japanese fans thrilled to *Kia Asamiya's* story of Batman's war with some of the most familiar member of his Rogues' Gallery, including the Joker, the Riddler, Two-Face, and the Penguin. Now American fans can enjoy that series as DC collects the entire story in ***Batman: Child of Dreams***. *Max Allan Collins* adapts the massive 352-page story, presented in English for the first time in this hardcover volume.

Batman: Gotham Knights #38 kicks off a new story-line that will change the Huntress forever! Checkmate has had its missions in Gotham thwarted time and again by Batman, and the covert agency has had enough. But when a dangerous situation within the Checkmate ranks forces David Said to enlist outside help…the target is the Huntress.

Batman: Legends of the Dark Knight #164 kicks off "Don't Blink," a four-parter by *Dwayne McDuffie, Val Semeiks, & Dan Green*. Blink, the blind man who can see through the eyes of whomever he touches, is back! Batman decides he needs the unique services of his old "friend," but learns he's been kidnapped by a group that may be working for the government. Whatever their allegiances, it's clear that Blink is being held against his will — and only Batman can break him free.

A hitherto-unknown professional relationship between Selina Kyle and Barbara Gordon is the focus of *John Francis Moore's* two-book prestige-format event in February. ***Birds of Prey: Catwoman/Batgirl*** (with art by *Darick Robertson & Jimmy Palmiotti*) and ***Birds of Prey: Catwoman/Oracle*** (with art by *Dave Ross & Jimmy Palmiotti*) offer a past-and-present look at the relationship, revealing details about a series of murders that led the two to put aside their differences and work together before more innocent victims fall to the killer.

Cosmic Odyssey, the cosmic saga by *Jim Starlin, Mike Mignola, & Carlos Garzon*, comes back into print for the first time in eight years. The tale finds Superman, Batman, Green Lantern John Stewart, Martian Manhunter, Starfire, the Demon, plus Orion, Lightray and Forager of the New Gods working together with one of the deadliest beings known to man in order to stop a

One-Stop Shopping

The December 2002 *PREVIEWS* has cool stuff that starts shipping in February!

On the front: Get into the mind and style of ***Hellboy*** creator Mike Mignola with Dark Horse's The Art of Hellboy HC!

On the back: Will Peter Parker and his estranged wife reconcile… or go their separate ways? Find out in the landmark Amazing Spider-Man #50 by writer J. Michael Stracynzki and artist John Romita Jr.!

Plus:

- *Windu, Mace Windu!* Get ready for Jedi-versus-Jedi lightsaber combat on a scale never seen before in **Star Wars: Jedi—Mace Windu**, as the Jedi master not only fights in the Clone Wars, but investigates the breakdown of the Jedi Order from within!
- *Batmania!* Max Allan Collins translates Kia Asamiya's incredible 352-page *Batman* graphic novel, **Batman: Child of Dreams**, originally serialized over a yearlong span in the pages of Japan's *Magazine Z* manga anthology!
- *Batman's Greatest Hero!* Paul Grist, creator of the critically acclaimed and fan-favorite series, Kane, brings his other series to Image Comics with the debut of **Jack Staff #1**!
- *Spider-Man Landmark!* It's the 50th issue of Marvel's **Amazing Spider-Man**, featuring Mary Jane… and the decision you've all been waiting for, courtesy of writer J. Michael Stracynzki and artist John Romita Jr.!
- *ToyFare World Premiere!* Wizard Entertainment's **ToyFare #50** feats a major, exclusive cover story on *MageKnight* and *HeroClix* creator WizKids latest and greatest innovation!

And:

- Brian Pulido brings his Diva of Destruction to CG Entertainment with **Lady Death #1**, featuring a new look, new direction, and a new beginning for the long-running dark fantasy heroine!
- Billy Tucci and Craig Shaw Gardner pull all the stops for **Shi—The Illustrated Warrior #7**, the stunning conclusion to the most dramatic and beautifully illustrated Shi series yet, courtesy of Crusade Entertainment!
- Roll the dice and get ready for fantasy role-playing hilarity with those misfits of the game set, the **Knights of the Dinner Table**, starring in their first mini-series — *A Previews Exclusive* from Kenzer & Company!
- The original six-issue mini-series from Marvel Comics is collected in **Transformers: Beginnings**, from Titan Books!
- The cult-classic manga of survival, teen treachery, and unbridled mayhem comes to America in *Viz Comics'* **Battle Royale #1**, from creator Koushun Takami!

Non-Stop Fun!

Don't miss out on:

- **Weapon X Statue** from Diamond Select Toys!
- **Clerks Inaction Figures** from Graphitti Designs!
- **Battle of the Planets Zoltar Disguise Action Figure** in the Toys Section!
- **The Simpsons Bobble Heads** in the Collectibles & Novelties Section!
- And more!

PREVIEWS

The monthly catalog where you'll find the hottest and coolest fun items in one convenient place!

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cosmic entity hell-bent on destroying the galaxy.

Kyle Rayner knows as well as anyone the allure of absolute power—because he possessed such abilities as Ion. ***Green Lantern: The Power of Ion***, reprinting *GL #s 142-150* by *Judd Winick, Dale Eaglesham, Eric Battle, Brandon Badeaux, Jamal Igle, Pat Quinn,* & others, Green Lantern's battle with his evil opposite, Oblivion, proves to be the biggest challenge of his career. When the hero expends all the energy from his Power Ring to stop his foe, he sheds his GL identity and transforms into something new and more powerful—an identity he calls Ion.

Hawkman: Endless Flight compiles the first six issues of the ongoing series by *Geoff Johns, James Robinson, Rags Morales, & Michael Bair*, adding selections from ***Hawkman Secret Files #1*** for good measure. These issues explored the relationship between the reincarnated Prince Khufu and his soulmate—also known as Hawkgirl. But with no memories of her past lives, Kendra has made it quite clear she wants nothing to do with Hawkman. Now the two heroes must figure out a way to work together as they unravel the mysteries within the enigmatic southern epicenter called St. Roch.

Who you gonna call? *H-E-R-O! Will Pfeifer & Kano* update the Silver Age Dial H for Hero concept in *H-E-R-O*. What would you do if you had powers beyond comprehension? Or more specifically, what would you do if you found a device that gave you such powers? That's the premise of this ongoing series, which shows how each person is affected by the powers bestowed on him/her. Jerry Feldon, the star of the first story arc, is one of those people. He's a young man living in a town where prosperity and industry have dried up, stuck in a lousy job without a future. A brush with Superman makes him even more depressed — Jerry could never be like him. And Jerry's depression is driving him toward one fateful decision, one he can never change. That is, until he finds a device that changes him. It gives him power. It gives him hope. But is that enough?

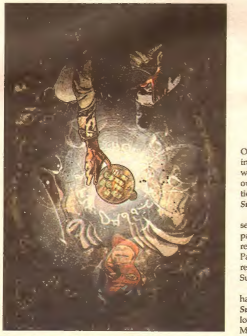
JLA: Riddle of the Beast, a 2002 original hardcover graphic novel, is reissued in softcover in February. This 104-page Elseworlds tale by *Alan Grant* and a multitude of art talents offers a fantasy take on the JLA canon. In a peaceful corner of a land plagued by hideous creatures and fractured by war, a young hero named Robin is sent on a lonely quest to unify the feuding lords of the sundered realms against the menace of the risen Beast. But as mighty as the armies of the Beast have become, it is ignorance and arrogance that are Robin's keenest enemies.

The next big JSA story arc, "Prince of Darkness," is beginning in March... but ***JSA #45*** presents a prologue to that five-parter, courtesy of *David S. Goyer, Geoff Johns, Leonard Kirk, & Keith Champagne*. Doctor Fate returns from his journey to Gemworld, where he finally discovers the true identity of the woman who gave birth to him. Also, the JSA stands vigilant as Kobra is finally brought to trial for his recent crimes.

Dan Jolley, Tony Harris, & Ray Snyder—the team that produced the acclaimed Elseworlds series ***JSA: The Liberty Files***—venture back into Golden Age alternate history with ***JSA: The Unholy Three***, a second two-part prestige-format series that picks up eight years after the events of the first series. *The Unholy Three* finds the Bat, the Clock and the Owl back in action — this time hot on the trail of a pair of KGB operatives code-named Parasite and Steelwolf. It seems the spies have been killing American covert agents in Berlin while tracking down the mysterious "trigger," a device that could bring an end to all life on Earth! Can the "Unholy Three" stop them in time?

Nightwing: The Hunt for Oracle compiles *Nightwing #s 41-46* and *Birds of Prey #s 20-21* in one hefty volume. Blockbuster, Bludhaven's deadliest crime boss, is on a rampage. A mysterious hacker has made Blockbuster's life difficult for far too long. It's time for Nightwing — with the help of the Birds of Prey — to hunt this person down and terminate this hacker's actions once and for all, at whatever cost. And that hacker is Oracle! This *Chuck Dixon* story arc is illustrated by *Greg Land, Patrick Zircher, Butch Guice, & Dreto Geraci*.

The new creative team of *Steven T. Seagle, Scott McDaniel, & Andy Owens* premieres in ***Superman #190***.



One of Metropolis' robots goes rogue, mistakenly thinking it's a real police officer. Superman must confront this would-be "man" of steel before it takes the law into its own hands! This issue is also presented ina special edition that includes the story originally presented in ***Superman: The 10c Adventure***.

Lois Lane... missing? Superman... dying? That's the setup for ***Superman: Critical Condition***, a 192-page trade paperback that follows Superman as he searches for the real Lois, who was hidden away by the villainous Parasite. Unfortunately, Parasite died before he could reveal just where the real Lois was... and that's where Superman's problems begin...

Chuck Austen & Danijel Zezelj explore some strange happenings in the Man of Steel's hometown in ***Superman: Metropolis***, a twelve-part maxiseries that follows Jimmy Olsen as he investigates the cause of Metropolis's strange events. It seems that the Tech intro-

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You want the best? We've got it! This month's *Previews* is chock-full of incredible toys, models, and more, with a selection of genres from the hottest comics to the coolest movies and beyond! Quality, diversity, variety...only in *Previews*!

Check out the December *PREVIEWS*, on sale November 27, for everything you see here!

DIAMOND Select

- Battle of the Planets Fan Kit
- Battle of the Planets Series 2: Zoltar PX Variant Action Figure
- New X-Men: Emma Frost by Greg Horn Poster
- Rogues' Gallery: Sunfire Bust
- Silver Age: Marvel Girl Medium Resin Statue
- Ultimate Nick Fury Bust (Regular & Special Edition)
- Weapon X Statue (Regular & Special Edition)

PREVIEWS exclusive

- Anime Freak PX T-Shirt
- Anime Junkie PX T-Shirt
- Baby Toyer 3-Inch PX Vinyl Figure Set
- Buffy Official Magazine #7 PX Cover Edition
- Catwoman: The Life & Times of a Feline Fatale Ltd. Ed. TP
- Devil Toyer 8-Inch PX Vinyl Figure
- Evil Dead: Ash PX Hockey Jersey
- Evil Dead: Skin PX T-Shirt
- Farscape Official Magazine #12 PX Cover Edition

- Five Star Stories English Language Manga Vol. 9
- Knights of the Dinner Table PX Mini-Series (Regular & Alternate Cover Editions)
- New Generation of Manga Artists Vol. 2: Gensho Sugiyama Portfolio (o/a)
- Toyer 8-Inch PX Vinyl Figure
- Vampire Hunter D: Meier Link PX Resin Bust (Regular & Signed)
- Xena: The Complete Illustrated Companion TP— PX Variant Cover Edition

DC DIRECT

- The Joker Snowglobe
- Pocket Super-Heroes Series 2: Silver Age Green Arrow & Black Canary 2-Pack
- Pocket Super-Heroes Series 2: Lois Lane & Bizarro 2-Pack
- Pocket Super-Heroes Series 2: Hourman & Golden Age Flash 2-Pack
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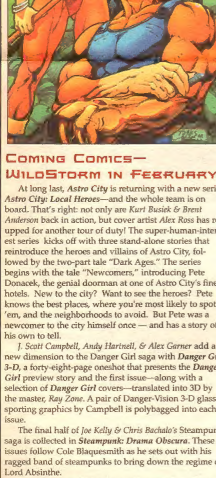
duced in stories collected in ***Superman: Endgame*** is once again is gaining sentience…with strange results! Jimmy encounters old folks made young again, villains merged together, and the dead who can't find peace. But who—or what—is behind these seemingly Tech-instigated events? What does it have to do with Superman? And how will Jimmy deal with a rival who threatens to overtake his status as the top photographer in Metropolis?

The Titans comes to an end with #50—but readers of *CSN* already know that DC has plans for the members of this team and Young Justice. In their final issue, the Titans must destroy the Consensus—and the alien creature that gives the Consensus its collective opinion. But it won't be easy, since the entirety of a brainwashed humanity doesn't share the Titans' point of view!

The *Walter Simonson-Jerry Ordway-P. Craig Russell* ***Wonder Woman*** run begins with ***Wonder Woman #189.*** Their six-part story, "The Game of the Gods," finds Wonder Woman missing in action. It's been weeks since anyone has seen Wonder Woman, and a world begins to fear it has lost its greatest heroine. Of course, Diana is not dead…although she is being buried in the Cryptocombe—a strange, otherworldly space that serves as the Cemetery of the Gods. Bereft of her memories, shorn of her powers and lacking her traditional costume, lasso and bracelets, Wonder Woman must rely on her Amazonian training as she fights her way out of the grave, battling a sea of foes and struggling to protect a strange statue of a baby girl, sculpted from clay.



Coming Comics—WildStorm in February

At long last, ***Astro City*** is returning with a new series, ***Astro City: Local Heroes***—and the whole team is on board. That's right: not only are *Kurt Busiek & Brent Anderson* back in action, but cover artist *Alex Ross* has re-upped for another tour of duty! The super-human-interest series kicks off with three stand-alone stories that reintroduce the heroes and villains of Astro City, followed by the two-part tale "Dark Ages." The series begins with the tale "Newcomers," introducing Pete Donacek, the genial doorman at one of Astro City's finest hotels. New to the city? Want to see the heroes? Pete knows the best places, where you're most likely to spot 'em, and the neighborhoods to avoid. But Pete was a newcomer to the city himself once — and has a story of his own to tell.

J. Scott Campbell, Andy Hartnell, & Alex Garner add a new dimension to the Danger Girl saga with ***Danger Girl 3-D***, a forty-eight-page oneshot that presents the ***Danger Girl*** preview story and the first issue—along with a selection of ***Danger Girl*** covers—translated into 3D by the master, *Ray Zone*. A pair of Danger-Vision 3-D glasses sporting graphics by Campbell is polybagged into each issue.

The final half of *Joe Kelly & Chris Bachalo's* Steampunk saga is collected in ***Steampunk: Drama Obscura***. These issues follow Cole Blaquesmith as he sets out with his ragged band of steampunks to bring down the regime of Lord Absinthe.

The 'Cats are back in ***ThunderCats: The Return***, a five-part series by *Ford Lytle Gilmore & Joe Pimentel*. Lion-O, imprisoned for the last half-decade and unaware of the passage of time, finally is rescued from captivity. He emerges into a nightmare world in which Thundera has fallen, evil holds sway, and the Thundercats are enslaved…those that are still alive, anyway. But Lion-O isn't the kind of king who'll sit by and watch this horror without putting up a fight…even though it may prove to be the toughest battle of his life!

Wildcats: Battery Park picks up where ***Serial Boxes*** left off, reprinting the *Joe Casey-Sean Phillips-Steve Dillon* story arc from ***Wildcats #s 20-28.*** In this volume, Grifter finally discovers the true fate of Zealot. Maul's research brings unwanted attention from the government. Spartan faces down a hostile takeover of the Halo Corporation. And the grievously injured Voodoo discovers an unexpected benefit of her hybrid genetics.

Coming Comics—Vertigo in February

Glenn Fabry's stunning cover art for ***Preacher***, originally available only on the original comics or in a now-out-of-print hardcover, is the focus of the ***Preacher: Dead or Alive*** trade paperback. Not only does it include all the covers for the comics and the various specials, it also includes the retail poster and the Fabry Preacher cover for ***Wizard***. The book also features commentary by Fabry and *Garth Ennis*.

The first six issues of Peter Milligan & Chris Bachalo's ***Shade, The Changing Man*** are collected in Shade, The Changing Man—The American Scream. This reinterpretation of Ditko's classic creation begins as twenty-three-year-old Kathy George relives the horror her parents' deaths. Hoping for a reprieve from the constant nightmares and the ever-present threat of insanity that have hounded her since their deaths, Kathy instead is swept up in Shade's arrival from his home dimension, Meta, into the body of the serial killer who destroyed her life. From there, Kathy and Shade begin a journey into America's collective unconscious as they combat the malevolent force known only as The American Scream.

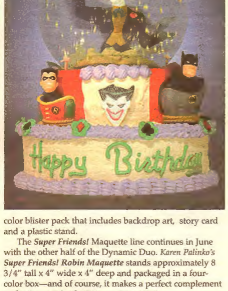
And what better time for a new Shade story by *Peter Milligan & Mike Allred*?... That's just one of the goodies you'll find in ***Vertigo: X***, a 99¢ forty-eight-page oneshot that , kicks off a yearlong celebration of ten years on the edge. Part retrospective and part exclusive looks at the projects that will define 2003 and beyond, this book also includes material from ***The Sandman: Endless Nights*** by *Neil Gaiman* and a variety of art talents; ***The Originals*** by *Dave Gibbons*; ***At Death's Door*** by *Jill Thompson*; ***The Losers*** by *Andy Diggle & Jocko*; ***The Wintermen*** by *Brett Lewis & John Paul Leon*; and ***Can't Get No*** by *Rick Veitch*, among other goodies, including interviews, an artist's jam, a time-line, a high school photo page, and more.

Garth Ennis introduces readers to an RAF flight officer plagued by bad luck in ***War Story: Archangel***, the final volume in the second four-part series of standalone tales set against the backdrop of war.. This tale teams Ennis with *Gary Erskine* as they introduce readers to Jamie McKenzie, one of Britain's CAMship (Catapult-Armed Merchantmen) pilots. Due to a shortage of aircraft carriers in 1942, the British began strapping obsolete, single-passenger fighter planes to ancient freighters and tankers, cramming them full of ammunition, and launching them by highly volatile rockets tied to each wing. But here's the kicker: The pilot must engage the enemy until his ammo is gone, then attempt to land with whatever fuel left or bail out into the sea and hope to be picked up. Needless to say, this isn't McKenzie's dream job...

Upcoming from DC Direct

The Joker Snowglobe is a delightful addition to any Bat-collection. This snowglobe, sculpted by *Sam Greenwell*, features the Joker—mounted on a spring—popping out of a birthday cake, surrounded by his sweetheart Harley Quinn as well as his captives: Batman, Robin, Batgirl, and Commissioner Gordon, each tied to a "dynamite" candle! Look for it in June.

DC launches the second wave of Pocket Super Heroes in June with a trio of new offerings. ***Silver Age Green Arrow & Black Canary, Lois Lane & Bizarro,*** and ***Hourman and the Golden Age Flash*** each feature two figures with six points of articulation, packaged in a full-color blister pack that includes backdrop art, story card and a plastic stand.



The ***Super Friends!*** Maquette line continues in June with the other half of the Dynamic Duo. *Karen Palinko's* ***Super Friends! Robin Maquette*** stands approximately 8 3/4" tall x 4" wide x 4" deep and packaged in a four-color box—and of course, it makes a perfect complement to the ***Super Friends! Batman Maquette!***

We told you that good things were going to come out of Mattel's acquisition of the Superman and Batman mass-market action figure licenses—and one of those good things is that DC is now free to offer figures based on their most famous creations! June brings a trio of new Superman family action figures: ***Superman: Cyborg***, with an amazing eighteen points of articulation; ***Doomsday***, with nine points of articulation; and ***Supergirl***, also featuring nine points of articulation. Each figure is packaged in a full-color blister pack, along with an S-shield base.

Designer *Phil Jimenez* and sculptor *James Skoop* have outdone themselves with the ***Wonder Woman Deluxe Bookends***. In a classic scene of good vs. evil, Wonder Woman uses both strength and her golden magic lasso to stop her nemesis Cheetah from stealing money and jewels from within a safe! It's a wonderful diorama made even more attractive when you add your own assortment of books to between the two bookends! These limited edition sculptures are scheduled for June release.

Coming Comics—Image in February

Achilles is forced to end his work stoppage and get back to war in ***Age of Bronze !16...*** but his mother, Thetis, is determined to stop her son from marching off to his own certain death! *Eric Shanower's* ***Age of Bronze*** presents the epic of the Trojan War in a refreshing new light, full of vitality and always faithful to it source material.

Aria is back in a new four-issue monthly series by *Brian Holguin & Lan Medina*, ***Aria: The Uses of Enchantment***. The story is set in a roadside theme park that flourished in the 1950s, but has sat abandoned for decades. When a mysterious invitation literally drops into Kildare's lap, she is led to a remarkable discovery in a genuine magical kingdom hidden away in the Catskill Mountains. But a dark and terrible secret lies buried at the heart of this fairytale land, a reminder of the dangers of getting what you wish for.

It's a battle royale in ***Athena, Inc. #6*** by *Brian Haberlin & Jay Anacleto*. All Morgan Castle's plans hedge on one final deal; once made, his and Athena Inc.'s futures are more than secured. But with Mary on the loose at Athena Inc., all Morgan's best-laid plans are worthless... or are they?

For the first time, ***Fathom #1/2*** by *Michael Turner, Olivia Chaiba, & Jonathan Sibal* will be available through your friendly neighborhood comic shop. In this revelatory issue, Cannon's father, who is passing away, reveals to his son the story of the family's legacy and the responsibility that comes with it.

Dan Jolley, Drew Johnson, Tom Feister, & Ray Snyder do the honors in ***G.I. Joe Frontline #5***. The story focuses on the mission that Duke tried to forget. In 1994, an international group of scientists gathered at an Arctic research base in a remote region of Norway for a project called Operation: Coldfire. Ultra-classified, top secret work of particular interest to the military. But one night communications from Operation: Coldfire ceased. Duke was sent with a team of soldiers to investigate...but only Duke came back. Now, seven years later, a distress signal has been received from the sealed Coldfire facility, and he must return, with G.I.Joe at his side.

Jim Mahfood's ***Grrl Scouts*** make a new home at Image with ***Work Sucks***, a four-issue series. When we last saw the Grrls, they had just taken down the evil and corrupt Nykee Corporation. Now word is spreading throughout the hood that they were the ones responsible for the bit. In order to keep a low profile and avoid any further heat, the Grrls make a decision to lay low. This includes stepping away from their duties as three of the biggest drug dealers in town. So how will they get by and survive without their main source of income? They'll all have to get real jobs, of course!

Michael Avon Oeming & Mark Ohia Wheatley bring Modi back for a new adventure in ***Hammer of the Gods: Hammer Hits China #1***. Modi has been honored by the gods and has fought by the side of Thorr. But now Modi is only a mortal, faced with the dreary life of an earth-bound warrior. He has become a berserker—the Norse equivalent of a death-wish. And he just *might* get his wish as the Gods send him on a quest to cross the world, find Odin. and set him free.

Paul Grist's ***Jack Staff*** makes his home at Image in February. In case you've missed out, here's the rundown: Jack Staff was once Britain's greatest hero... until he disappeared, some twenty years ago. But now he's back—and it seems that his return has brought back some of the dormant bad guys and weird menaces, too. Oh, to be truthful, they never *really* went away. They just got a little bit more bad and a little bit more weird... One of those bits of weirdness was Rage—240 pounds of pure destructive force manufactured by the British military. Jack Staff defeated him twenty years ago, saving Castletown. Now, twenty years later, the inhabitants of Castletown are suffering violent 'Rage Attacks'—and Jack Staff is needed once again.

Jim Krueger, Steve Kurth, & Ray Snyder present the first ***Micronauts*** spinoff miniseries, ***Karza***. When Ryan Archer was abducted and transported to the world of the Micronauts, he witnessed Baron Karza's tyranny first hand. Now, with the help of the enigmatic Time Traveller, he will go on a journey through time and space, and learn how the megalomaniac became the monster he is today.

If you only know the Devil's Due Studios Gang through their work *on* ***G.I. Joe*** and ***Micronauts***, then you're missing out on their more... well, shall we say creative?... side. You can see what you've been missing, though, by picking up a ***Bunnuny & Mrs. Bunny in Sex and the Love Life***, starring the world's most dysfunctional super-duo. Follow Lovebunny and Mr. Hell through a not-so-typical superhero day interpreted by three different creative teams! Watch them engage in superhero training on caffeine, house hunting with the Amish, and an evening of ex-boyfriend stalking!

Jay Faerber's first five issue ***Noble Causes*** story arc is compiled in ***Noble Causes Volume One: In Sickness & In Health***. The star of the series is Liz Donnelly, a relatively normal woman whose life is turned upside down when she marries Race Noble, popular superhero and a member of the Noble family, the world's best-known super-

hero dynasty. When her new husband is killed by one of his enemies, the newly-widowed Liz begins to learn much more about her new family than she ever imagined...

Fiona Avery, Dan Jurgens, & Jason Gorder fill in a few gaps in *Rising Stars: Bright*, a sidebar story to the core *Rising Stars* saga. In that series, it is mentioned that at one time, Matthew Bright ran away from Pederson and, under an assumed name, became a member of normal society and a police officer. In *Bright*, Matthew tells this story in his memoirs—and readers learn how a Special can shine brightest when he's just being human.

Jason Lee & J. Korim mix *Battlebots* and *Fight Club* in *Rotogin: Junkbots #0*. Rotogin battles have been banned in Nalus City for the past 8 years. However, an underground organization is setting up illegal robot tournaments using the city as their battleground. Rebuilding a robot she found in the junkyard, Kaylin Dakota enters into the shady world of illegal robot battles and gambling, in hopes of saving her friend Asper's life.

A down-on-his-luck cat burglar is the star of *Sammy: Tourist Trap*, a four-part series by *Azad*. Sammy's latest misadventure finds him in Acapulco, where he's not so much vacationing, as he is fighting for his life. The heist was a success, and they got away squeaky clean. All that was left was to get paid... But its never quite that simple is it? Especially when doing a job for Jesus Vega, an artifact aficionado who has been known to welsh on his deals.

Jade Dodge & Matt Camp explore the space between fantasy and reality in *Shadows #1*. The *X-Files*-ish series focuses on four paranormal investigators who have set out to bring to light those things that hide in the shadows. But they find, along the way, that some creatures that live in the shadows will do anything to keep it that way. For their first assignment, the fledgling investigators are sent to the Mt. Hood National Forest. Reports of a bigfoot attacking campers and residents have been coming in at an alarming rate. But why would a creature, known for it's docile behavior, turn vicious?

Lara had never suspected how many fates worse than death could befall a Tomb Raider—Until she died. Now, *Tomb Raider #28* finds Lara lost in a half-world between yesterday and never, victim of a vengeful undead pharaoh's lust and malice—twenty-two bullets away from an eternity of horror. And if she can somehow release Amenhotep and his shadow legions from their cursed afterlives– She's still dead... Or is she?

Want to know what Top Cow has in the works for

next year? Then you'll have to have the *Top Cow 2003 Compilation Special*, where the company lets you in on a few of their biggest new properties and specials set to premiere later this year!

David Wohl & Keu Cha spotlight Ian Nottingham in the eponymously entitled *Witchblade: Nottingham*. The story follows Nottingham to Japan on a soul searching journey; his plans are interrupted, though, when he becomes a suspect in a murder investigation. As the mystery of who the actual killer unfolds, Ian realizes that his past truly is coming back to haunt him. Too bad Sara Pezzini isn't here to help, because this may be way more than Ian can handle...

The Games People Play

Big Heroes, Small Metal

It's been a while since fans could actually choose figurines from a line of metal miniatures for a superhero game, but the long day spell is coming to an end. In classic superhero style, *two* teams are coming together to deal with this challenge, as Guardians of Order combines their might with that of Reaper Miniatures to create a new line of miniatures based on the *Silver Age Sentinels* role-playing game.

The companies are planning to release four figures every two months, starting with Sentinel, Kzeurzitter, Slipstream, and Alice, Queen of Hearts. The miniatures will be 30mm scale, making them slightly larger than most miniature lines on the market. No price has been announced, but the first wave is expected to release in February 2003.

Midnight Arrives Around February

It's a dark, dark world, and you get the chance to game in it. The world of *Midnight* is an evil setting, where good has been driven from power, and the forces of evil are fighting to destroy it for all time. As a player in this new setting, you can choose to play one of the remaining heroes, fighting for survival, or one of the evil hunters trying to destroy the last hope of the world. The choice is yours. *Midnight* uses the d20 system, and comes with new skills, new character classes, and lots of new magic—including a new magic system that erases the line between arcane and divine. *Midnight*, the new book from Fantasy Flight Publishing, will be released in February.

A Little Light Poison

So, what's your poison? If you aren't too sure, then make a plan to pick up the new *Pale Designs: A Poisoner's Handbook* from Bastion Press. This new 96-page full-color volume covers a wide variety of poison styles, from the fangs of monsters through to the dark concoctions of a wizard's lab. The sourcebook includes not only rules for poisons, but also new prestige classes, new equipment, and new magic items that are great for assassins...er, um, or anyone that might want to use poison. Not just assassins. No. Not assassins. Ignore that part. *Pale Designs: A Poisoner's Handbook* will be out in January for the suggested retail price of $24.95.

Yu-Gi-Oh Gets a New Start-er

One of the big questions running through the *Yu-Gi-Oh* community is, "when are the Pegasus and Joey decks coming out?" Well, it looks like the answer to that question is spring of 2003, probably in March—because that's when Upper Deck is going to release its second series of *Yu-Gi-Oh! Starter Decks*... and it's quite likely that those decks will be the eagerly-awaited Pegasus and Joey decks.

Upper Deck hasn't clarified whether or not the cards will be identical to the structure decks that were released in Japan. What we do know is this: the current Kaiba and YuGi decks will be going out of print, and there is no word on whether or not they will be coming back into print. Upper Deck plans on making the new starters immediately tournament legal, but final decisions won't be made until close to the release date. Keep checking with CSN for updates as they become available.

Salvatore's Popular Story Becomes RPG

There seems to be some demon activity as of late. First, it was the comic. Now, it's the role-playing game. *R.A. Salvatore* is probably best-known for his novels based on the *Forgotten Realms Campaign Setting*, and now he's getting a chance to reverse the trend. The rights to *Demon Wars* has been acquired by Fast Forward Entertainment to produce it as a d20 game for 2003.

"The first product will introduce character classes and the magic of the *Demon Wars* saga," Fast Forward President Jim Ward stated. That first product will be a 128-page hardcover volume slated to release in April of next year. This announcement comes right on the heels of Crossgen Entertainment's announcement of a comic series based on the same series of novels, which should be out later this month.

DragonFist Returns... for the First Time

In the year 2000, Wizards of the Coast published a game called *Dragon Fist*, trying to capture the action and drama of asian action cinema. You might not have heard of this game...since it never saw print. It was released exclusively as a PDF, but that is about to change. Green Ronin Publishing has acquired the rights to produce a pen-and-paper edition of *Dragon Fist*, producing it under the Open Gaming Licensie. The game will be released in the summer of 2003.

Armageddon Set for 2089

The future isn't what it used to be.

WarMech–Armageddon 2089 is the new d20 game setting from Mongoose Publishing that attempts to put a hard-science spin on the giant robot/mecha genre. The game tries to anticipate the future, deriving the science of the game from the current technology and the advances that are anticipated in the coming years. The core 256-page full-color rulebook will ship at the same time as the *Mech Arms and Armour Catalog*, giving players plenty of support material at the same time as the initial release of the game. More expansions are planned, as well as a line of fiction based on the setting. The anticipated release date for the WarMech line is March of 2003.

The New Talisman

Games Workshop has had many popular games over the years, but there is one game that seems to keep making its way back to the shelves. It's been almost a decade since it was last seen on the shelves of the gaming store, but in April 2003 *Talisman* returns! Don't blink, though, because Games Workshop is planning to do just *one* printing of the old classic.

There have been many expansions for *Talisman* over the years, but none of those will be coming back into print; the core based game serves as a stand-alone product, complete with plastic miniatures, full-color cards, and everything else you need for a night of fun.

Talisman is a board game that has players racing though a series of "levels" as they try to get enough power and materials to get to the center of the beard and slay the dragon to win the game. The tentative price for the new edition of *Talisman* is $75.00, and it is due out in April 2003.

White Wolf Goes for the Gamma

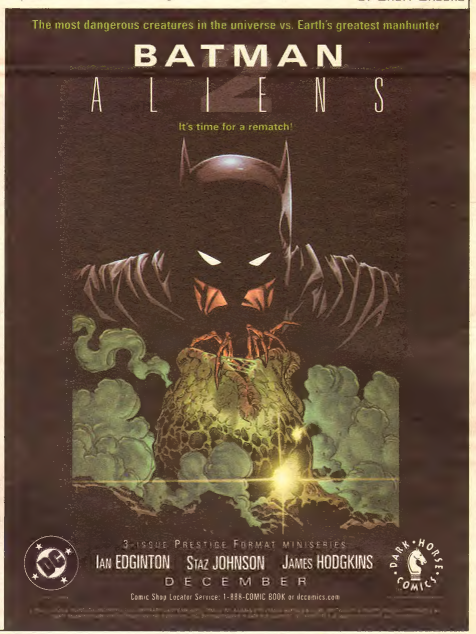
They've already put their mark on the lands of *Ravenloft*, and now White Wolf is looking to the stars. One of the most popular settings from the Golden Days of TSR was *Gamma World*—all...was it four or five versions?—and now it's back for another round. White Wolf will be producing *Gamma World* as a d20 product in the summer of 2003, starting with the *Gamma World Player's Handbook*. The new edition of the game will be loyal to the original, but at the same time be an all-new reinterpretation. The new game will introduce many new concepts, including genetic research, nanotechnology, and artificial intelligence. The exact details aren't available at this time, but you can bet that *CSN* will be there to pass them along as they become available.

Xcelsior No More!

WizKids already has big plans for the next *Marvel HeroClix* expansion—but plans are subject to change. Wizkids recently announced a *Marvel HeroClix* expansion which originally had the title of Xcelsior, but due to unforeseen circumstances, the title had to be changed. (While there is no official report, rumor has it that the recent lawsuit brought against Marvel by *Stan Lee* has prompted the change. Lee made the word "excelsior" his own personal trademark for years, and the similarity of the word to the title of the new set might have been too much for Marvel.)

The new set of figures will be the second set of Marvel figures in a row, with the next release for the *DC HeroClix* line planned for early summer 2003. Keep checking with *CSN* for more news about the contents of each set as it becomes available.

BY BRETT BROOKS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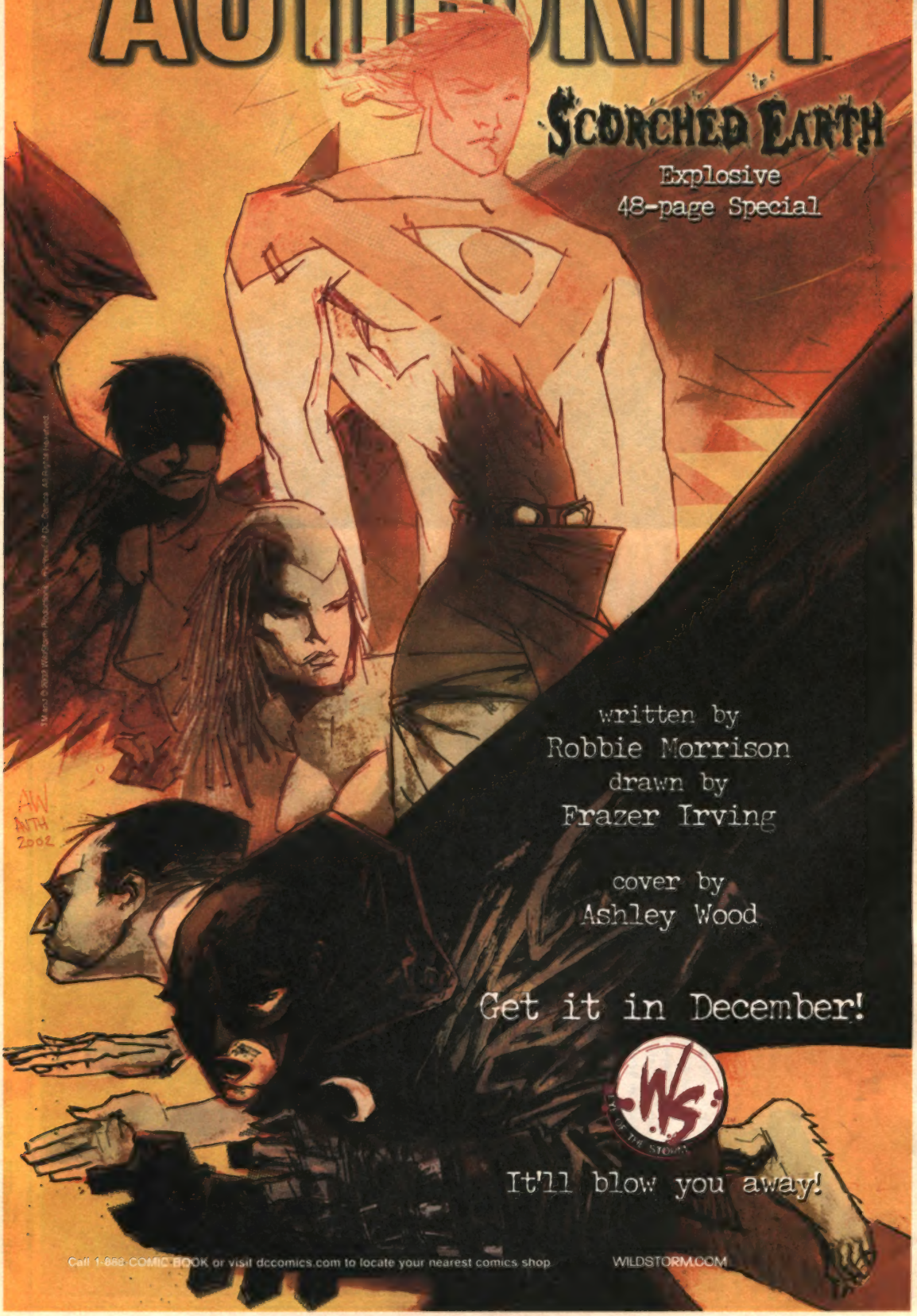

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